

Motorcycle Safety Leaves No Margin For Error

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4/13/2003 - **LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE, Va. (AFPN)** -- In December, a young airman was visiting his family for the holidays. After dinner and a movie with his mother, he told her he was going for a ride on his motorcycle. That was the last time she saw her son alive.

He was 10 minutes from home when he lost control of his bike and was killed instantly. He was wearing the necessary protective gear, had not been drinking, had received all the required training and was considered a safe rider.

"He worked hard as a turbo-prop apprentice and was well respected by his peers and supervisors," said the airman's squadron commander, Lt. Col. Thomas Fitch of the 355th Component Maintenance Squadron at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz. "This young man was trained, briefed and sober, and still made a mistake that cost him his life."

This is one of many stories that highlight a dramatic rise in motorcycle and vehicle mishaps in the military forces.

The high mishap rate has continued into 2003.

"With our fight in the global war on terrorism, we need each one of our people fit and ready for duty," said Gen. Hal M. Hornburg, of Air Combat Command. People are our number-one priority -- we need to aggressively help stop this disheartening string of serious motorcycle mishaps and fatalities."

Airman 1st Class Wayne Anema, a riding partner of the airman who was killed, became president of the base motorcycle advisory council at Davis-Monthan after his friend's death.

The mentoring program for new motorcycle riders will have a safety and training board that will advise new riders from an experienced rider's perspective, Anema said. It will also educate new riders on required personal protective gear, safety procedures, safe riding conditions and standards of conduct.

"We find that airmen are safety-conscious on the job, but forget about risks at home," said Chief Master Sgt. Will Early, head of ACC ground safety. "What we need to practice is PRM: personal risk management."

PRM is similar to the Air Force's concept of operational risk management, but it is a mindset that encourages military people to be safety conscious at all times, Early said. His command has started teaching PRM to young airmen because 65

percent of motorcycle fatalities are among grades E-1 to E-4.

All Military personnel must understand the risk, and that the power of a motorcycle can be dangerous.

There has never been easier access to extremely high-performance bikes than there is today. For a few thousand dollars, anyone can buy a machine that will do 150 mph right off the lot. Unfortunately, the combination of youth, inexperience, fearlessness and powerful machinery can be deadly."

As a motorcycle rider, Anema agrees.

"Inexperienced riders are buying powerful motorcycles, and they don't have respect for their vehicle," Anema said. "My advice is that if you see a rider doing something stupid on their motorcycle, don't be afraid to stop them."

Just as we must follow standards of behavior during duty hours, motorcycle riders are expected to observe a code of conduct while riding their bikes off-duty. The DOD requires motorcycle riders to obey operational and protective equipment requirements, along with standards of conduct.

Before operationg a motorcycle:

You must have MSF (Motorcycle Safety Foundation Training) or equivalent recognized training.

Operational requirements:

- Headlights must be on.
- Vehicle must have rear-view mirrors.

Required personal protective equipment:

- Properly fastened protective helmet.
- Properly worn eye-protective device.
- Sturdy footwear.
- Long-sleeved shirt or jacket.
- Long-legged trousers.
- Full-fingered gloves.

- Brightly colored or contrasting vest or jacket as an upper garment during the day and a reflective garment during the night.

Standards of conduct:

- Obey the posted speed limits at all times.
- Drive according to road and weather conditions.
- Accomplish mandatory training.
- Maintain proper bearing and behavior.
- Never attempt to operate the motorcycle beyond your or its capabilities.
- Never operate a vehicle while intoxicated.
- Never let anyone ride your motorcycle that is not properly trained.

Military members need to be healthy and able to fight in the ongoing war against terrorism and to support operations around the world,

Above all, we are in the Military 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We have a professional responsibility and we took an oath to be ready to defend this country. Today, in this war, taking care of ourselves and each other, and managing and controlling risks, are ultimate responsibilities for all of us."